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Kuan Yin, Chinese  
Late Sixth Century, Shansi

## DIGNITY OF BOSTON'S ART CULTURE

BOSTON preserves the dignity of a cultured community in its art activities as manifested by its Museum of Fine Arts. The acquisitions of this institution always give a clue of seriousness of purpose and high standard of selection. Take, as examples, the "Battle Scene" by Uccello and the Chinese statue of Kuan Yin.

The "Battle Scene" was acquired from Paris. "M. C." writes in the bulletin that the painting, which is in tempera on wood was formerly in the Butler Collection, London, although it does not appear in the catalogue of the Butler sale (March, 1911), as it was sold at another time.

Paolo Uccello was born in Florence in 1397, and died there in 1475. As a painter he had two chief interests—perspective, a science then in its infancy, and the representation of animals. Because of his love of birds he was called Uccello, and about his house were numerous paintings of animals which he kept because he could not have the living animals themselves. Unfortunately, although his fellow-citizens marvelled at his skill in perspective, he was not as popular as if he had devoted more study to the human figure, and although he received commissions from the Medici from monasteries, and from the city for a fresco in Santa Maria del Fiore, much of his time was spent in painting panels for chests, couches, and other pieces of furniture. The Museum painting is

such a panel and was originally part of a marriage chest or cassone.

In subject and treatment the panel is very similar to the series of three large panels in the National Gallery, the Louvre, and the Uffizi, which are among the few remaining documented works of Uccello; it is a typical example of the style of this rare and interesting master. In the centre two companies of knights are engaged in a furious conflict; in the immediate foreground a knight lies stretched on the ground, while his horse gallops away; directly behind, a second knight is represented falling from his saddle; at the side a horse is shown writhing in death. The armor of the knights with their plumed or winged helmets, the caparisons of the prancing steeds, and the violence of the action reveal the skill of the master. At the left is a solid phalanx of reinforcements, the front rank with their lances in rest; at the right a small group of men is standing mournfully around a decapitated knight whose head is held by the soldier at the left of the group.

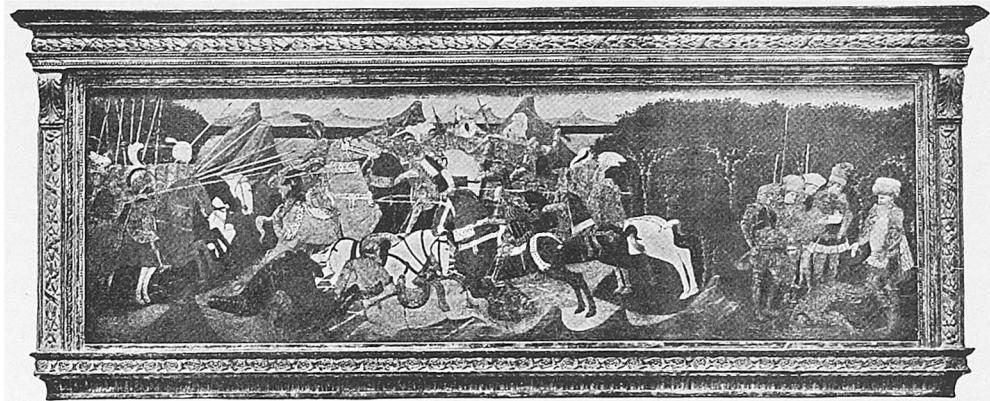
Writing on ancient Chinese sculpture acquired by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, "J. E. L." examines two heroic statues of Kuan Yin (Avalokitesvara), deity of compassion, the one a product of the early fifth century, from Honan province; the other of the late sixth or early seventh century, from the province of Shansi.

The first statue represents the deity,

probably in a feminine manifestation. (Avalokitesvara was originally an Indian male deity; but as time went on; and Buddhism passed from country to country, he came to be endowed with feminine attributes and was often represented as a woman.) Her right hand is raised as though in benediction. Owing partly to the loss of the left hand we cannot be sure of the precise form in which the artist intended his Kuan Yin to appear, but it is evident that she originally sat between other figures which are, perhaps, still extant in the now unknown temple from which she was taken. In any case, there can be no doubt that the technique of the statue is truly archaic; but it is equally certain that in purity of inspiration and sincerity of expression the artist has achieved a result more striking in its appeal than many another produced in later times.

In the second statue is seen the same deity, again in feminine form, standing on a lotus pedestal, guarded by four lions. She wears an elaborate headdress in which a tiny figure of her Lord, Amita Buddha, is set; her body is clothed in flowing drapery, over which a profusion of looped-up

chains and other pendant ornaments are hung; thin veils float downward from her jewelled arms, and in her left hand she carries a cluster of lotus buds. Everywhere, but especially on the back of the figure, there still remains abundant evidence that her flesh, as well as the ornaments she wears, was once overlaid with gold, while her garments and the pedestal on which she stands were brilliant with many colors; but even now, when so much of her glory has vanished, she exists for us as one of the most splendid and perfect specimens of Chinese Buddhist sculpture that can be seen today. This very quality of splendor, however, is not in itself wholly reassuring, and it seems inevitable that such elaboration of graceful detail, such facility and perfection of technique must, in the last analysis, entail a certain measure of spiritual attenuation. In the placid, smiling face of the goddess, her full, round arms, her rather sensual hands and general sumptuousness of person, there are many suggestions of a luxurious environment in which the simple austerities of true religious and artistic inspiration could not long survive.



Battle Scene, by Paola Uccello